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Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (2016)

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Markets, Globalization & Development Review



Book Review

Parag Khanna, Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization (2016)

Introduction

Parag Khanna's conceptual tour of the world through the book "Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization" provides the reader with vivid details of the connected world that we live in (Khanna 2016). The prime message of this book is about connecting the global nodes, through building infrastructure starting from oil pipelines to fiber optic cables. Exploring diverse arenas and delving deep into some topics more often than the others, this book gives an overview of why "connectivity" is important for the entire world and not only for the selected few.

Parts of the Book: Part One and Two

Part One of the book discusses connectivity as destiny through journeys around the world. A succession of journeys via several modes of transport – such as ferry, train or automobile – does not intimidate contemporary travelers. With the help of these transport modes, they can move across different terrains ranging from rugged to mountainous, and volcanic to coastal. Global infrastructure has given shape to global transportation, communications, and energy infrastructures to connect every corner of the world where people have made some form of habitation or other human establishment. With the help of infrastructure, connectivity brings epochal changes – creating megatrends such as rapid urbanization and ubiquitous technology. Thus, according to the author of the book, connectivity bridges the gap between supply and demand through commitment in creating infrastructure, producing benefits collectively in terms of creating jobs, and making improvements in poverty-reduction, health, education, and other objectives.

The book also emphasizes that connectivity makes political borders porous – no matter how physically robust they are – through people crossing and migrating, trade, and cross-border business cooperation. More and more people take opportunities to travel across borders as countries eliminate visa requirements, enable exchangeable currencies, and almost free communication through online phone calls, thus making connectivity convenient to increasing numbers on the planet. The

emphasis put forward here is on the functional geography rather than political. The focus is on the functional space – that is, how we actually use the world. Infrastructures help lay the foundation of the emerging global system through connecting empires, city-states, or sovereign nations, transforming the political divisions into mutually structured places.

Supply chain is a continuous variable that never sleeps. Contemporary supply chains create connecting pathways that link every local, regional, national, and international node; to form a universal network. Whether one is sleeping in Russia or awake in United States, supply chain is that invisible actor that works for a constantly running movie called “globalization.” It is like a universal movie that traverses across countries, crossing political borders one after another, as well as sailing across oceans. The main purpose of supply chains is to connect the supply with demand thus forming a global supply chain system. In this chain system, a diversity of actors are involved, but all worship one truth: to trust one another with the core premise of ‘efficiency’ in their minds. This chain is not only about transporting tangible products from one location to another but also giving opportunities to different classes of labor – physical and intellectual, in a vast range of industries – to experience and possibly climb the global economic ladder. Although the supply chain carries the tag of a ‘connector,’ still brickbats are thrown at it. This is because it is also seen as a part of the destruction of scarce natural resources, such as forests to gold mines, as well as a conduit for illicit activities like smuggling of drugs, weapons, and people; with the help of criminal organizations like Japan’s Yakuza, Russian Bratva, Italy’s Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta, and Mexico’s Sinaloa.

Khanna states, “it is time for geopolitics to have its own complexity revolution” (p. 29). Indeed, complexity is bound to arise in a multi-actor system within a global and networked civilization (see, e.g., Woodside 2017; on complexity, and a review of this book on complexity in this MGDR issue, Zareian 2019), and connectivity is the main cause for it. It is also true, however, that connectivity is the reason for the ‘change’ that emerges continuously to transform the system itself. The global system also meets the supply with the demand through flows and frictions, where flows can be raw materials, technologies, manpower, and knowledge, and frictions can be barriers, obstacles and breakdowns. Moreover, the focus of core global players is on maximizing flow and minimizing friction. Flows, however, bring risks along with rewards; and that is why countries become apprehensive and take precautions by introducing frictions to curb their downside in the forms of capital controls on speculative investment, limited liberalization to ensure domestic industrial competitiveness, and so

on. The challenge that countries face is how to optimize and balance the flows with frictions and that is why nations have used cautionary moves to protect their interests amidst the presence of almost global free market.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It began in the third millennium before the Christian era and continues to advance every day as humankind progresses. The trade points and networks scattered at various locations of the world, however, have changed over time as the nature of connectivity changed from empires to territorial countries, networked cities, regional commonwealths, cloud communities, and stateless companies. This is due to the economic weight, proximity to zones of growth, political stability and attractiveness for foreign capital that these new cities or communities offer to the supply chain world. Gone are the days of Western dominance of New York and London, which controlled global economy through trade barriers, immigration restrictions, financial retrenchment, and political nationalism. Rather, the American economy's dependence on globalization continues to grow with respect to inflows and outflows of talent, investment, goods, services, and capital seeking high returns. It is the connectedness that helps the supply chain operations flourish that, in turn, yield positive returns to the countries and companies. That is the reason why nation-states – including emerging economies, and their companies – realize the importance of building infrastructure in order to harness the resources into wealth through competitive advantage.

Part Two of the book discusses the great devolution followed by aggregation and the new manifest destiny. In the great devolution part, Khanna discusses the concept of 'Devolution,' which is "the perpetual fragmentation of territory into even more (and smaller) units of authority, from empires to nations, nations to provinces, and provinces to cities" (p. 63). Simply stated, devolution points toward not only independence, fragmentation, and decolonization, but also authority and autonomy to pursue one's own interests. Devolution played a significant role in reducing international conflicts, border disputes and became an important driver of global stability, more so than democracy. There are, however, several multiethnic countries – such as India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Myanmar – that still witness internal violence, requiring further political devolution, infrastructure investment, and exploitation of resources. One can also see how conflict resolution had been a priority for many nations starting from former Yugoslavia to other European nations where nations became federations of powerful local administrative centers. The Catalans and Scots are examples of those centers where they moved towards greater autonomy as well as cities, such as Manchester and Sheffield, that

developed their own urban and regeneration plans and skills programs with the help of infrastructure loans from London's devolution plan. Similar devolutionary movements can also be observed in Italy and France where reorganizations were done based on economic viability.

Following devolution is aggregation, a long-term phenomenon, beyond political division. Both fragmentation and unification can be observed in several parts of the world where borderlines have shifted for geopolitical order. Remapping took place comprising several countries keeping in mind the integration of functional aspects of monetary system, transportation routes, financial networks, supply chains and so on, so as to create overlapping functional zones resulting in economies of scale beyond geographical limitations. Furthermore, the Indo-Gangetic Plain spanning across several hundred kilometers shows boundaryless plethora of resources that a region can have and from which several nations can benefit. Similarly, countries located in Southeast Asia and Africa have contributed towards building infrastructure, often by discovering and leveraging one another's comparative advantages. Moreover, China leveraged Africa's resources through building infrastructure, such as, railways, that would boost the supply chain system to China's advantage. Khanna analyzed the turmoil of Pax Arabia excellently, wherein he illustrated the ongoing political goals with transparency, featuring the resource-linked interests of the Americans, some European nations and some Arab states. The troubled countries of Libya, Syria, and Iraq were in spotlight due to the ongoing chaos that affected the oil supply chain as ISIS strategized to control infrastructure, such as, dams, pipelines, refineries and roads. Amidst the Israeli-Palestinian problematic duel, Israel built industrial zones involving food packaging, textiles, and furniture assembly, which serve both Israeli and Palestinian economies and workers. The combination of plethora and scarcity of oil and water made connectivity possible through joint venture infrastructures where water canals, pipelines and railways traverse across borders.

In the discussion on new 'manifest destiny', Khanna nicely laid out the intricacies of the American economy's struggle through portraying supply chain centric cities – such as Detroit and others – and making comparison with China in terms of managing government relations with cities as well as manufacturing jobs. Khanna further detailed the assets that the key cities of America are known for, and also identified the gaps of those cities from being optimally economically effective.

Parts Three, Four and Five

Part Three of the book lays out competitive connectivity starting from the World Wars to supply chain wars, infrastructure alliances, iron age to sovereigns of the sea. Khanna started by neatly pointing out the fact that economic coercion is a tool in today's geopolitical maneuvering. The tug-of-war mentioned by Khanna was directed towards supply chain wars entailing flows of money, goods, resources, technology, knowledge, and talent. Both transatlantic and transpacific seem to be the supply chain route for the three big economies, viz., USA, EU and China, as trade volumes increase on a regular basis even amidst political differences. Some of the great examples of trade relationships despite political differences are between China and Taiwan, India and Pakistan, and India and China.

Khanna then moves into supply chains and talks about the widely scattered manufacturing supply chains working towards the common goal of production, both physical and digital, in manufacturing as well as services. It was also interesting to observe how products carry labels of both developed nations, such as USA, Japan and Germany along with emerging markets, such as, India and China. Tariffs, however, play the spoiler role in this global trade environment, when political interests coincide with economic muscle power. Khanna's key message is on connectivity as the key for prosperity, with good infrastructure augmenting connectivity between points. Supply chain is one of the products of connectivity, leveraging and transferring resources strategically to manufacturing locations and products to the consumers, despite threats of piracy and terrorist attacks in places like Nigeria, Pakistan, India, and Myanmar. For example, China is leveraging its supply chain dominance by building infrastructure around the world along with accessing raw materials and bringing them into their backyard. Moreover, sanctions against some countries are giving way to sprawling global supply chains for the sake of competitive connectivity.

While discussing the new Iron Age, Khanna provides detailed information about the revival of the Silk Road spanning from Central Asia through Russia to China. Resources were the attraction to optimize the supply chain in the forms of highways, pipelines, and railways; and China was instrumental in building the infrastructure needed through alliances. Moreover, advanced supply chain systems reduced logistics time, creating efficiency as well as transferring demanded resources across several regions. Another interesting thing to note is geopolitical competition where trade deals, particularly infrastructure and weapons, involve both allies and non-allies, which shows that commercial interests override most other

interests. Moreover, Khanna did not forget to highlight the countries controlling the oceans for supply chain purposes. Countries are willing to do military interventions in order to protect their supply chain infrastructure. Besides mechanical and electronic items, oil and gas are the main resources flowing via global supply chains, and global companies like Shell's Prelude develop their mobile sovereignty by building natural gas platforms. Furthermore, energy pipelines and canals also help in connectivity as companies build infrastructure for optimizing supply chains.

In Part Four, Khanna points to some cities that have become mega hubs of foreign trade. He points out how Dubai is becoming the capital of the modern world, moving beyond its label as the capital of the Arab world. The role of supply chains made Dubai the economic and cultural hub due to its geolocation and capacity to absorb and transmit goods, services, finance, people, and data. More businesses are setting up to take advantage of its vibrant resources and connectivity to other places. On the African side, Lagos is another supply chain hub that caters to the surrounding region, although the focus needs to be on modernizing and curbing corruption in the oil sector and creating jobs for the youth in rural areas. Reflecting on Asia, Khanna discusses the supply chain system in the form of foreign trade zones or Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in countries like India and China that have successfully leveraged the SEZs for their own benefit by harnessing the skills, expertise and resources of global companies. Not only wages of the workers increased in those countries, but jobs increased as well, since local and global companies wanted to take advantage of tax holidays. Both developed and emerging economies were benefitting from SEZs as foreign investment kept entering such zones. The SEZs were originally set up as infrastructure hubs, and many turned into cities attracting people from all over. Urbanization flourished due to thousands of supply chain nodes run by companies in emerging economies along with foreign trade and foreign investment. Governments also turned to the capital markets to secure finance for infrastructure needs. Khanna does mention some of the problems of the global supply chain system in terms of quality of products, infrastructure standards, and ethical governance. It is true that global companies often violate local rules while extracting resources in order to meet their supply chain goals. The book also talks about corruption affecting investors, particularly in developing countries.

In Part Five, Khanna discusses global society through cyber civilization, genetic dilution of people, and how nature shapes modern supply chains. He starts by discussing the Internet, which connects almost

every corner on the globe. Software industry flourishes because of internet and companies developing services using cyber-connectivity. Internet traffic is mostly privately controlled; however, government interventions and regulations do exist. Cyber-attacks are also prevalent as some countries have commercial agendas against others. Moreover, developing countries benefitted from low-cost infrastructure through cloud-based software, data storage, and enterprise applications. Furthermore, digital infrastructure has made connectivity possible by combining physical-virtual marketplaces. This has helped consumers to access information, lower-cost products, and various services. The internet also helped the digital workforce – by connecting job providers and freelancers – creating novel employment opportunities.

Khanna then moves the concept of genetic dilution, noting that it is not a recent phenomenon. It is an old practice but particularly more pronounced in the current century as we see more transnational and circulatory movements across the globe. Khanna argues that cities like Toronto, London, New York, Dubai, and Singapore are incubators of new mongrel global civilization, where the ‘original’ ethnic makeup is being constantly ‘diluted’. Residents of such cities are prouder of their city than of their nation, substituting ‘civicism’ for nationalism.

Finally, Khanna discusses climate change and how it has made humans think of relocation strategies, from big cities to small, from urbanization to ruralization, living close to nature yet working digitally. Climate change also impacts nature – through rising sea levels, desertification of fertile lands, drying rivers, droughts and other natural calamities, thereby creating nomadic zones in different spots across the globe. Food and water are crucial resources needing attention, in order for countries to build infrastructure to serve their populations. Sustainability initiatives, however, cannot keep up with industrialization through carbon and gas emissions, leading governments and ordinary human beings to continually look for livable places.

Conclusion

In the end, Khanna wraps up by highlighting how – in this rapidly evolving world – connectivity plays the role of simply connecting the dots and how most of the times the dots and the links are complex, carrying some forms of uncertainty. Markets, society, media are all stakeholders of connectivity and these stakeholders leverage their interests or at least appreciate globality as a reformed standard of civilization. Nonetheless, this global society still serves the interests of a few powerful and wealthy nations who are caretakers of fluctuating global stability. Supply chains seem to be the

modern weapon of maintaining peace amongst superpowers. With resources being widely distributed in a borderless world, the gap between demand and supply is bound to shrink through distributed connectivity.

Besides emphasizing the strength of global supply chains for connectivity, Khanna did a commendable job as he portrayed his versatility by delving into diverse disciplines, to develop and display his argument for a connected world. What is lacking, to an extent, is the depth of analysis of facts and figures, as also the multiple reasons behind those facts and figures. To highlight some of these issues, I would cherry pick three instances where Khanna's arguments could be challenged. The first one is Khanna's stance towards a balance between pro-capitalism and free trade or emergence of "state capitalism" as a win-win situation for the masses. Examples of Brazil's car manufacturing and India's software services are not broad enough to lead by example. Khanna went on to cite physicist Michio Kaku's "perfect capitalism" (page 19) to coin his term "supply chain world". Dembour and Stammers (2018) made a distinction between free trade and protectionism where they clearly stated, "the trade policy of modern states wavers between the desire to expand the domestic market by opening up both home and foreign markets whilst also being constantly aware of the need to protect the home market from negative external impacts. The hope is that securing access to external markets will trigger valuable opportunities and economic gains. The fear is that the creation of a bigger, more open, market might undermine, or even decimate, the local economy and society" (p. 171). This assertion by Dembour and Stammers (2018) clearly highlights the fact that free trade cannot be a siloed advantageous tool. The same idea was echoed by Khanna when he notes that "we will likely never have a global free market but rather have a world where the expanding global economy becomes even more a strategic battleground" (p. 33). Even public-private partnership schemes had been criticized by organizations and non-governmental entities for socializing the risks of investments without socializing the profits (San Juan 2018). Second, there are some glimpses of self-conflict. For instance, Khanna highlights the concerns for climate change and yet he would vouch for fracking and construction of pipelines to fulfil increasing demands of oil, albeit what Khanna highlighted through "fracking" on page 40 was inflow of European and Asian capital into U.S. fracking operations. Khanna also depicted some sustainable sensitivity, which may console environmentalists, when he pointed out on pages 164 and 208 about water-free and water-intensive shale gas fracking. It would be unfair to blame Khanna for his pro-fracking stance as Sapinski (2016) pointed out that "climate capitalism might be here to stay irrespective of

international agreements because the number of factors involved in it and the amount of investment it generates are now sufficient to propel it forward” (p. 90). Betsill and Hoffman (2011), Grubb (2012) and Paterson et al. (2014) offer similar views. Third, Khanna’s overarching argument of the longevity of a frictionless supply chain world amongst superpowers remains an open question. Khanna mentioned “frenemies” on page 149 to highlight “how we have shifted from a Westphalian world to a supply chain world. The world’s leading powers have become financially integrated, with investment linkages as important as trade relations”. There are instances, however, when financial integration does not create a profitable situation between two trading nations, as evidenced by recent trade-escalation – provoked by the U.S. administration – and directed at several nations around the world, particularly the European Union and China (Fetzer and Schwarz 2019), resulting in trade competitions morphing into trade conflicts. Indeed, as Ecke (2019) points out in another review in this issue of MGDR, the idea of American Exceptionalism is often coming in sharp conflict with the need for peaceful global development.

In its totality, Khanna’s pervading visionary approach covers bits and pieces of almost everything to make the world connected for future prosperity. A persistent question remains, though: How consistently will such views about a connected world continue to hold amidst tensions in this geopolitical world?

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